

Box 100 (P) 10

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Genevieve De Hoyos

Person-in-Environment: A Tri-Level Practice Model

- Social workers have become increasingly concerned about developing a metatheory. However, attempts have failed and an eclectic approach to practice is generally used. The author presents a framework designed to integrate the various therapeutic models available.

Genevieve De Hoyos is Professor, School of Social Work, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

SINCE THE WAR ON POVERTY was initiated, social workers have sought to expand their focus from individual clients to clients as they function within their environment. Among educators, this emphasis has led to many philosophical arguments, the proliferation of treatment models, and the introduction of two major theories—the general-systems theory and the ecological theory. Educators have sought to develop a metatheory that would simultaneously explain human behavior at the intrapsychic, interactional, and sociocultural levels.¹

A review of the recent social work literature suggests that practitioners are indeed moving from traditional intrapsychic therapy to more systemic intervention. However, this movement appears to be spurred by increased concern with clients' environment rather than by adoption of a specific systemic therapy.²

This phenomenon may suggest that the social work profession is emphasizing person-in-environment treatment approaches but not committing itself to a specific theoretical approach. Although such an eclectic approach is valid, the profession needs integrative models that broaden the perspective of workers as well

1. Genevieve De Hoyos and Claigh Jensen, "The Systems Approach in American Social Work," *Social Casework* 66 (August 1985): 490-97.

2. Ibid.

as facilitate the understanding and integration of the growing number of therapeutic models.

The present article reviews earlier attempts at integrating various models under a single metatheory and discusses why such attempts failed. A framework that broadens the perspective of professionals while facilitating the integration of various theories and therapies is introduced.

The Search for a Metatheory

Helping professions, in general, typically develop around one or more theoretical approaches. Since the 1930s, social work has been primarily based on neo-Freudian theories, which have worked well with middle-class clients.³ However, since the 1960s, social work practitioners have been encouraged to broaden their perspectives to include person-in-environment approaches,⁴ to adopt the systems approach,⁵ and to focus less on individual

3. Ibid.

4. Jerome H. Zimmerman and Gary A. Lloyd, "From General Systems Theory to Cybernetic Models for Curriculum in Human Behavior and Social Environment and Social Work Practice" (Paper presented at the Council on Social Work Education Meeting, 10 March 1982, New York), p. 2; Mary Paul Janchill, "Systems Concepts in Casework Theory and Practice," *Social Casework* 50 (February 1969): 74-82; Ben A. Orcutt, "Casework Intervention and the Problems of the Poor," *Social Casework* 54 (February 1973): 85-95; Ann Hartman, "To Think about the Unthinkable," *Social Casework* 51 (October 1970): 467-74.

5. Hartman, "To Think about the Unthinkable"; Janchill,

responsibility and more on the interactions between individuals and their environment.⁶

To this end, educators have proposed two metatheories designed to explain human behavior in all situations and all environments.⁷ By the early 1970s, general systems theory had become the preferred theoretical model among social work educators,⁸ some of whom developed intricate models to make the theory relevant to practice.⁹ Toward the end of the 1970s, however, interest in general systems theory declined, giving way to the ecological systems theory. Again, relevant practice models were developed;¹⁰ the ecological approach was declared by some to be the only appropriate social work metatheory.¹¹ However, some basic problems remained unresolved.

General Systems Theory

The general systems theory fits the demands

"Systems Concepts in Casework Theory and Practice"; Orcutt, "Casework Intervention and the Problems of the Poor"; Anne Vickery, "A Systems Approach to Social Work Intervention: Its Uses for Work with Individuals and Families," *British Journal of Social Work* 4 (Winter 1974): 389-404; Caryl B. Germain, "Social Study: Past and Future," *Social Casework* 49 (July 1968): 403-409; Anthony Forder, "Social Work and System Theory," *British Journal of Social Work* 6 (Spring 1976): 23-42; Robert Leighninger, Jr., "Systems Theory and Social Work: A Reexamination," *Journal of Education for Social Work* 13 (Fall 1977): 44-49.

6. Hartman, "To Think about the Unthinkable"; Germain, "Social Study: Past and Future"; Janchill, "Systems Concepts in Casework Theory and Practice"; Orcutt, "Casework Intervention and the Problems of the Poor"; Vickery, "A Systems Approach to Social Work Intervention"; Gerard Egan and Michael A. Cowan, *People in Systems: A Model for Development in the Human-Service Professions and Education* (Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1979), p. 5; Ann Hartman, "Diagrammatic Assessment of Family Relationships," *Social Casework* 59 (October 1978): 465-76.

7. Max Siporin, "Ecological Systems Theory in Social Work," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 7 (July 1980): 507-32; Robert D. Leighninger, Jr., "Systems Theory," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 5 (July 1978): 446-66.

8. Janchill, "Systems Concepts in Casework Theory and Practice"; Hartman, "To Think about the Unthinkable"; Leighninger, "Systems Theory and Social Work: A Reexamination"; Leighninger, "Systems Theory."

9. Orcutt, "Casework Intervention and the Problems of the Poor"; Vickery, "A Systems Approach to Social Work Intervention"; Forder, "Social Work and Systems Theory."

10. Hartman, "Diagrammatic Assessment of Family Relationships"; Egan and Cowan, *People in Systems: A Model for Development in the Human-Service Professions and Education*.

11. Siporin, "Ecological Systems Theory in Social Work."

of a metatheory; that is, it explains human phenomena at different levels of complexity. However, when it is applied, the theory introduces a major problem. Because it is primarily useful for understanding the process of change, the theory provides little help for understanding the more static reality (structure, functioning) of a system.

General systems theory was developed during the 1940s and 1950s by Ludwig von Bertalanffy. Drawing upon the physical sciences, he suggested that all social sciences could be integrated by using systems as a unit of analysis. Since system can refer to the personality system and the small-group system as well as the societal system, general systems theory was proclaimed a metatheory capable of explaining the process of change at all levels.¹²

This focus on change, which was popularized by Walter Buckley in the late 1960s and 1970s,¹³ captured the imagination of militant American youth and became the rallying point in their demands for changes in the government, military, economic, and educational systems of the nation.

The popularity of general systems theory, however, drastically waned among sociologists when no workable methodology was developed to verify the basic propositions of these theories of change.¹⁴ Among social workers, the popularity of general systems theory waned because its basic assumptions never fit some of the assumptions of social work practice:

1. Evidently social workers were never convinced that client change was more functional and desirable than was stability. Robert Leighninger noted that social workers tended to ignore the crucial cybernetic aspect of open systems.¹⁵

12. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, "General Systems Theory," in *System, Change, and Conflict*, ed. Nicholas J. Demerath, III, and Richard A. Peterson (New York: Free Press, 1967), pp. 115-19.

13. Walter Buckley, *Sociology and Modern Systems Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

14. As early as 1973 and 1974, sociological theory textbooks stopped mentioning general systems theories. See Nicholas C. Mullins and Carolyn J. Mullins, *Theories and Theory Groups in Contemporary American Sociology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); Jonathan H. Turner, *The Structure of Sociological Theory* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1974).

15. Leighninger, "Systems Theory and Social Work: A Reexamination."

2. Because general systems theory failed to provide models that explained the structure and functions of a system, Jerome Zimmerman and Gary Lloyd¹⁶ insightfully pointed out that some authors¹⁷ could not write about human behavior in the social environment on the basis of general systems alone. To fill the gaps, these writers simply and unabashedly borrowed conceptual and theoretical models from incompatible equilibrium theories.

3. Social work practitioners could never wholeheartedly follow Gordon Hearn's suggestion to become boundary workers, that is, to limit their activities to regulating, modifying, or screening information entering and leaving their clients' individual system.¹⁸

4. Others evidently agreed with Max Siporin that even though general systems theory explains human phenomena at all levels and therefore functions as a metatheory, it overemphasizes the radical at the expense of the conservative, social change at the expense of social stability.¹⁹

Ecological Approach

The ecological approach widened the focus of social work by emphasizing interaction between humans and their environment and formalized the important notion of environmental intervention. In doing so, this theory has made an important contribution to the profession. However, it has not been able to provide social work with a workable metatheory.

Based on Kurt Lewin's field theory, the ecological approach primarily focuses on human ecology, the way human beings and their environment accommodate each other.²⁰ This interaction is dynamic; that is, goodness of fit between individuals and their surroundings is achieved through mutual interaction, negotia-

tion, and compromise.²¹ To assess this goodness of fit among clients, Ann Hartman developed two extremely useful tools—the eco-map and the genogram.²²

Many who support the ecological approach reject the medical model because of its exaggerated concern with the intrapsychic and with "curing" the individual after the fact. They attempt to broaden this approach by concentrating on the interaction between individuals and their support systems and by using a more preventive approach. Indeed, they emphasize the need to work with groups and institutional structures and refuse to limit themselves to intrapsychic intervention.²³

However, it is difficult to take seriously the disturbing claim that ecological theory could serve as a metatheory for the field of social work. For example, it has been described as "an overarching global theory which embraces several limited theories"; an umbrella that permits "a strategy of multiple perspectives"; an orientation that encourages "the social worker to be theoretically and technically eclectic, in the best sense of the term."²⁴ Such claims are made after proponents of this school of thought have clearly rejected the medical model. Moreover, for this theory to serve as a metatheory, it would have to be able to explain simultaneously intrapsychic, interactional, and socio-cultural phenomena. However, this theory focuses primarily on human beings in interaction.

Neither general systems theory nor the ecological approach can serve as a metatheory because general systems is primarily concerned with explaining change, whereas the ecological approach is primarily concerned with explaining humans in interaction. Thus social workers are faced with whether they should work toward developing a metatheory or should be content with eclectic approaches.

16. Zimmerman and Lloyd, "From General Systems Theory to Cybernetic Models for Curriculum in Human Behavior and Social Environment and Social Work Practice."

17. Ralph E. Anderson and Irl Carter, *Human Behavior in the Social Environment: A Social Systems Approach* (New York: Aldine, 1984).

18. Gordon Hearn, "General Systems Theory and Social Work," in *Social Work Treatment*, ed. Francis J. Turner (New York: Free Press, 1979), pp. 350-53.

19. Siporin, "Ecological Systems Theory in Social Work."

20. Egan and Cowan, *People in Systems: A Model for Development in the Human-Service Professions and Education*.

21. Carel B. Germain and Alex Gitterman, *The Life Model of Social Work Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 4-7.

22. Hartman, "Diagrammatic Assessment of Family Relationships."

23. Egan and Cowan, *People in Systems: A Model for Development in the Human-Service Professions and Education*, pp. 5-6.

24. Siporin, "Ecological Systems Theory in Social Work," p. 516.

Metatheory or Eclecticism?

A metatheory for the social sciences may not be feasible today. On the other hand, uncontrolled eclecticism may become very confusing. However, a workable framework within which many different theoretical and conceptual models can be kept under control and in proper perspective is needed.

Metatheories and the Problem of Reductionism

As theoreticians have considered the possibility of metatheories in the social sciences, they have invariably faced the difficult problem of reductionism. Reductionism refers to the error of explaining a phenomenon belonging to one level of abstraction through conceptualization that belongs to a different (and typically less complex) level of abstraction. Reductionism occurs when social scientists assume that "social life becomes organized into increasingly complex structures of associations,"²⁵ and further assume that each level of complexity is basically different from other levels, because new properties emerge when people organize at a high level of complexity. In other words, "the whole is MORE than the sum of its parts."²⁶

The study of human behavior has been subdivided among various disciplines for more than a century. Psychologists study the personality structure, explaining individual human behavior through personality traits. Social psychologists explain human behavior according to the interactions among individuals within small groups. Sociologists research social organizations and social structures, explaining human behavior through the inner workings of these organizations and structures. Each discipline is dedicated to the study of its own complexities.

Consequently, social scientists have given up on the idea of creating a metatheory. Instead, they have established three basic disciplines: psychology, social psychology, and sociology.

A Cautious Invitation to Eclecticism

Because of their concern with reductionism, social scientists would probably advise social

workers to abandon the idea of a metatheory and to make appropriate use of the many theoretical and conceptual models available in the three basic disciplines. However, adopting an eclectic approach blindly may be dangerous when persons refer to diverse models without concern for their underlying assumptions and implications. One must understand the theoretical underpinnings of theories and therapies. Without deeper understanding, "eclecticism" becomes more guesswork than good practice.

On the basis of the above, three conclusions may be drawn: (1) Because social scientists have been unable to formulate a metatheory, developing such a metatheory for social work may be unrealistic at this time. (2) If social workers want to broaden their focus to include a person-in-environment approach and no metatheory is available at this time, a good alternative might be eclecticism. (3) Although eclecticism may be the obvious answer, unregulated eclecticism will produce poor social work practice methods. To prevent such an occurrence, the following framework is suggested.

Person-in-Environment: A Tri-Level Practice Model

Most social workers use an eclectic practice approach. Generally speaking, they identify and work simultaneously with clients' individual problems, their problems within primary groups, and their problems within society. They may or may not switch from one therapeutic approach to another. If they do switch, they may do so intuitively and perhaps haphazardly.

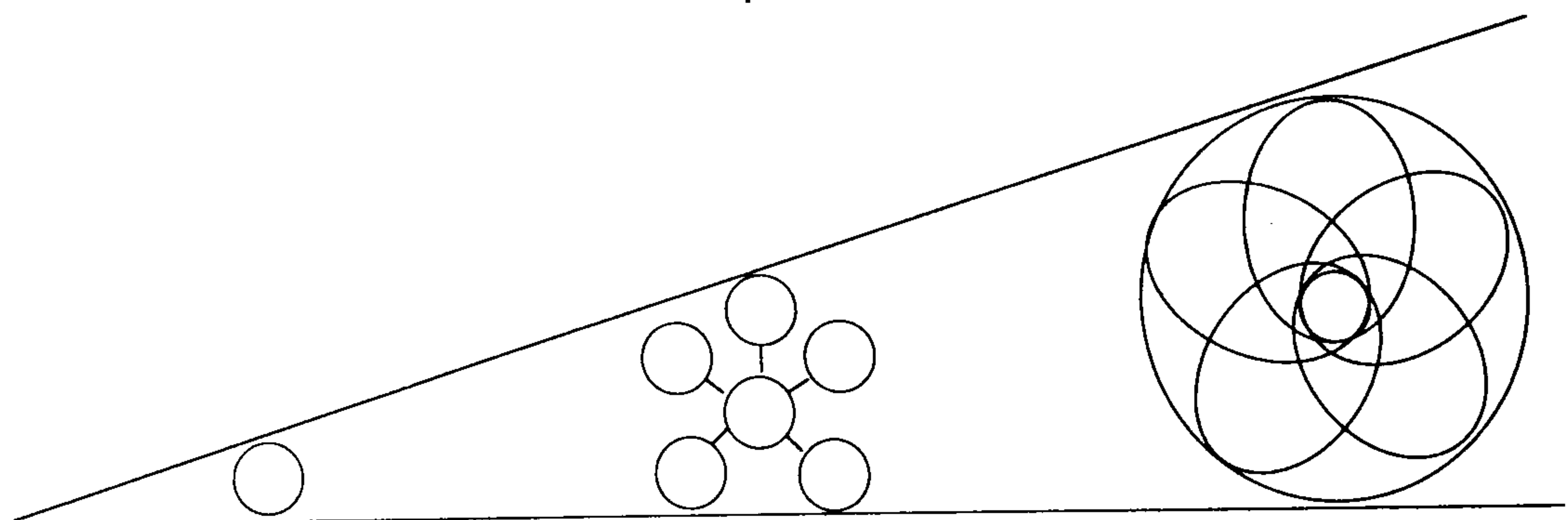
The tri-level practice model shown in Figure 1 was developed in an effort to clarify the level and types of intervention available to social workers today. The major function of the tri-level model is to help social workers organize their thinking by indicating important analytical differences among problems as well as crucial theoretical differences among therapies. In so doing, the model helps workers (1) identify relevant factors originating in the personality system, the interactional system, and/or the socio-cultural system and (2) become more aware of alternative therapeutic approaches as they deal with various problems at various levels.

The model does not suggest the therapy to be used. It simply lists, at each level, a few of

25. Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (New York: John Wiley, 1967), p.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Figure 1. Person-in-environment:
A tri-level practice model.



Personality system (psychology, casework)	Interactional system (social psychology, group work)	Sociocultural system (sociology, casework, group work, community organization)
<p><i>Problems involved</i> Intrapsychic problems Thought distortions Personality problems Behavior problems from simple maladjustment problems to men- tal illness</p>	<p>Alienation problems Communication problems Interpersonal problems: marital problems parent/child problems changing family roles Etc.</p>	<p>Problems related to dysfunction in societal structures and/or to cross- cultural problems: poverty programs minority problems unemployment changing sex roles criminal behavior substance abuse divorce and single-parent mental health problems aging Etc.</p>
<p><i>Major theories</i> Freudian theory Neo-Freudian theory Cognitive theory Humanism Behaviorism</p>	<p>Ecological theory Communications theory Structuralism Functionalism</p>	<p>Parsonian theory Conflict school</p>
<p><i>Major therapies</i> Psychoanalysis Insight therapy Ego therapy Cognitive therapy Reality therapy Rogerian approach Humanistic therapy Gestalt therapy Behavior modification Etc.</p>	<p>Ecological approach Satir's therapy Marriage family therapy structural therapy functional therapy strategic therapy paradoxical therapy Etc.</p>	<p>Sociocultural assessment and therapy Traditional community organization Social action Advocacy Empowerment Etc.</p>

the most frequently used therapeutic approaches. This list can be improved on and added to.

The First Level

The first level focuses on the personality system and therefore depends on the knowledge of psychologists. It is referred to when problems appear to be related to personality

maladjustment, that is, to client's mood disturbances, thought distortions, value confusion, behavior problems, or any combination of the above. At this level, problems are viewed primarily as originating within the client. Therefore, the solution to these problems requires modification of the client's feelings, thoughts, values, and/or behavior through

understanding, resolving, reframing, or retraining until change is achieved.

Choice of psychotherapy mode depends on the assumptions that are made about human behavior. For example, if it is assumed that individual maladjustment is primarily related to conscious or unconscious feelings emerging from early traumatic experiences, one is thinking in terms of Freudian or neo-Freudian theories; psychoanalysis, insight therapy, or ego therapy could be used. If it is assumed that most individual problems are related to some thought distortion, one is following cognitive theory and may select cognitive therapy, William Glasser's reality therapy,²⁷ or Albert Ellis's rational-emotive approach.²⁸ If it is assumed that most individual problems are caused by feelings related to societal values that interfere with human ideals and potential and if one wished to free clients from societal demands, one is taking a humanistic approach. From this perspective, the therapist may prefer the Rogerian approach if he or she tends to be accepting and permissive.²⁹ But if the therapist is more confrontive and/or the client tends to use denial, the therapist may want to use some version of gestalt therapy. Finally, if the practitioner assumes that individual problems are related to the behavior one is rewarded or punished for, the therapist may prefer to use behavior modification.

Of course, these distinctions are primarily used for the sake of analysis. Social workers, like theorists, are aware of the importance of all four components of personality (feelings, thoughts, values, and behavior) and work with all four. However, in the process of developing a therapeutic style, many therapists make assumptions that lead them to prefer one theory and one therapy over others.

The Second Level

This level focuses primarily on the interactional system. Here, the therapist depends on the field of social psychology when clients' problems appear to emerge from their face-to-

face interaction with significant others in primary group settings such as their family, extended family, work group, church group, recreational groups, friends, neighbors, and so forth. The problems may involve clients' inability to reach out, communicate, or accommodate role and structural expectations. However, problems often originate in the client's environment, that is, due to a malfunctioning of other group members or of the group structure itself. Thus the focus is moved from the individual client to the groups in which the client interacts.

Typically, when clients are concerned about their problematic interactions with others, the therapist finds that it is both a personality problem and an interactional problem and conducts therapy by moving back and forth from the personality system to the interactional system. When the therapist switches to the interactional system approach, he or she can choose one (or more) of the following therapies, depending on the assumptions he or she makes about human relationships in general and the individual in particular.

For example, if the therapist assumes that individual maladjustment is primarily related to the lack of support systems, he or she may choose Germain's life model and ecological therapy.³⁰ If the therapist assumes that faulty communication skills are causing the client's maladjustment, he or she may use Virginia Satir's techniques and teach more appropriate ways of communicating.³¹ If the therapist assumes that problems suffered by one individual or a family group originate in the structure or functioning of the group, he or she may choose between structural therapy and functional therapy. If individuals in the group tend to deny or be resistive, the therapist may prefer to use strategic or even paradoxical techniques.

As the therapist moves from the first level to the second level, he or she moves from the individual's feelings, thoughts, values, and behavior to the interactions of this individual within his or her family group, work group, church group, and so forth.

27. William Glasser, *Reality Therapy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

28. Albert Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy* (New York: Lyle Stuart, Inc. 1962).

29. Carl R. Rogers, *Client Centered Therapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951).

30. Germain and Gitterman, *The Life Model of Social Work Practice*.

31. Virginia Satir, *Peoplemaking* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Science and Behavior Books, 1972).

The Third Level

This level focuses on the problems clients deal with in their sociocultural system, that is, the four societal institutions of the economy, government, education, and religion.³² At this level, social workers depend on sociology for their knowledge base. They need to view their role as one of analyzing the relationship between humans and their institutions. In all societies roles determine what societal rewards are distributed; this is why professionals talk about conditionally rewarding roles. Societal rewards are given only in exchange for some degree of conformity to the laws, traditions, norms, and role expectations attached to the various roles.³³

For example, the role of student in an educational institution provides status, recognition, new skills, new experiences, the hope of a better job in the future, friendship, and even love in exchange for one's acceptance of authority, self-discipline, hard work, dependability, commitment, and so forth. A work role in the economy gives the individual a chance to gain status, money, space, recognition and power in exchange for time, work, dependability, and loyalty. A person's role as citizen allows him or her the privilege of participating in the system of government in exchange for conforming to the laws that are enacted by this system. A church role may provide the individual with a sense of belonging, being loved, security, and a sense of transcendence in exchange for conformity to the beliefs, values, and rules of that particular religious institution.

Roles are conditional and crucial to an individual's functioning. On one hand, it is through

roles that societies distribute rewards as well as secure conformity from the majority of its citizens. On the other hand, it is through roles that members of a society acquire basic necessities as well as intangibles such as status, recognition, and identity. Both tangible and intangible rewards fulfill deep inner needs of individuals; most people are willing to conform to societal demands in order to meet these inner needs.³⁴ Sociologists suggest the following basic principles: (1) occupying conditionally rewarding roles in formal organizations helps a person conform to societal expectations³⁵ and (2) occupying conditionally rewarding roles allows an individual to achieve great satisfaction and a good self-image.³⁶

Although these two principles may work for most people, they certainly do not work for everybody. Some people in all societies are dissatisfied with their conditionally rewarding roles. Therefore, three additional principles need to be introduced to take into account faulty social structures and deviance from roles: (1) When roles and/or rewards are not perceived as rewarding, individuals deviate from the norms.³⁷ (2) Deviance may escalate because occupying conditionally rewarding roles in a deviant organization, that is, delinquent gang, organized crime, a corporation practicing price-fixing, and so forth, leads to deviance.³⁸ Problems may occur when organizations in a society view some segments of the population as being unprepared to fill conditionally rewarding roles. These same segments of the population view themselves as being discriminated against. When this occurs, many individuals are without conditionally rewarding roles. (3) Sociologists suggest that not being able to achieve conditionally rewarding roles results in hopelessness and despair and results in the loss of deferred gratification.³⁹

Many clients, particularly minorities and the poor, experience problems related to their societal roles. These problems leave them power-

32. The family is not defined as an institution under the third level. This omission is justified based on the fact that economy, government, education, and religion are part of the impersonal social forces clients often feel they cannot understand or control. On the other hand, their family, with whom they continuously interact, is their primary group. Therefore in therapy it is more relevant to view family relationships as part of clients' interactional system (as the social psychologists do) than as an impersonal institution made up of roles and role incumbents (as do the sociologists).

33. Richard T. LaPiere, *A Theory of Social Control* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954), pp. 80-91; Harry M. Johnson, *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960), pp. 16, 19; Harry C. Bredemeier and Richard M. Stephenson, *The Analysis of Social Systems* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), pp. 321-28.

34. LaPiere, *A Theory of Social Control*, pp. 238-40.

35. Johnson, *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction*, pp. 22-23.

36. Bredemeier and Stephenson, *The Analysis of Social Systems*, pp. 60-62.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-32.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.

less and overwhelmed by societal forces that they cannot understand or control. At the third level, two approaches are available to the practitioner: (1) If the practitioner assumes that societal maladjustment is primarily related to unfair structures and practices in society, he or she approaches the problem in terms of conflict theories. Conflict therapy suggests social action that empowers clients and intervenes in societal structures. (2) If the practitioner assumes that the problem is more complex and that it involves not only faulty and exploitative social structures but also cultural dislocation on the part of the client, the practitioner views the problem in terms of equilibrium theories. The therapeutic model often used by social workers in such cases is Parsonian theory.⁴⁰ This intervention allows the social worker to help clients obtain and adjust to the conditionally rewarding roles they desire. In so doing, the social worker becomes an interpreter, teacher, and arbitrator for the social organizations and clients.

At the third level, workers truly become applied sociologists. Rather than focusing on the personality of clients, they focus on clients' conditionally rewarding roles or lack of them in an effort to help clients make a satisfactory adjustment to the societal institutions in which they participate.

To summarize, the tri-level model provides structure to the eclectic approach and reminds practitioners of the person-in-environment. It helps practitioners integrate as well as differentiate among the myriad individual and group therapies. This model challenges workers to make better use of their sociological knowledge base as well as to develop new sociocultural therapies and skills.

40. Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1951).

Discussion

The tri-level model attempts to synthesize the many diverse therapeutic approaches used in social work today. Although its intent is less ambitious than either open systems or the ecological model, it does synthesize current therapies without violating basic principles of the scientific method and without challenging eclecticism. The tri-level model is able to do this because:

1. The model does not attempt to explain human behavior. It merely suggests that human behavior can be perceived through three distinct frames of reference and three types of explanatory theories: psychological sociopsychological, and sociological.

2. Because the model is descriptive, it includes any and all therapeutic approaches. It is eclectic and open-ended. Therefore, it facilitates the accommodation of any additional problem, theory, and therapy.

Two major themes and two major assumptions run through the tri-level model: It assumes (1) the value of the systems approach and (2) that human systems seek to maximize pleasure and well-being while minimizing pain. All theories and all therapies listed under each of the three levels are congruent with these two assumptions. For therapists who choose not to include the most confrontive of humanistic and marriage and family therapies, or the conflict approach, it also assumes that our society works and is viable; therefore the order approach in sociology is acceptable and valid. Thus the tri-level model helps broaden the perspective of workers, allowing them to be eclectic in their approach while diminishing confusion. Moreover, the tri-level model helps workers maintain a dialogue with diverse practice theories while continuing to search for a framework that is unique to social work practice.